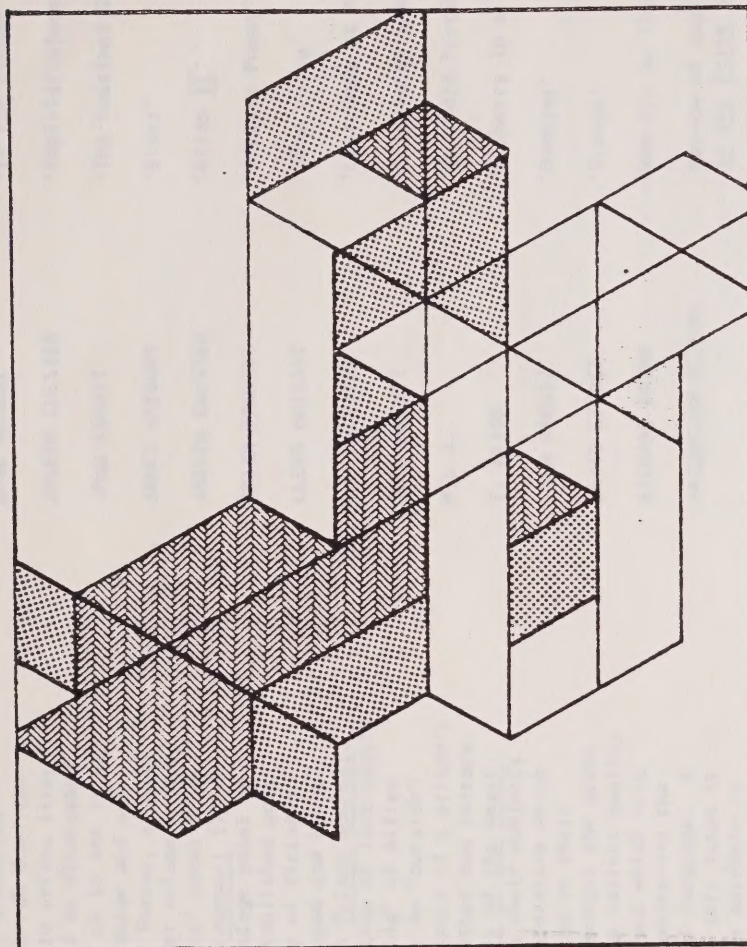


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EDITORIAL

The first issue of Prison Journal asserted our fundamental goal: the creation of a forum for an authentic dialogue between the prison and the "outside" world. In this second issue we have attempted once again to fulfill these objectives. We have not done it through rhetorical special pleading, but rather by printing work which deserves, on its own merits, a hearing. Several new features underline our attempts to break down the false duality of "outside"/"inside" as applied to prison literature, a misapprehension that has often resulted in dismissing it as a freakish sub-genre, instead of enabling us to see it as an important example of the common bonds of language and art. In this issue there is an interview with Sharon Thesen, as well as an important new poem and a selection from her volume Artemis Hates Romance. There is also a cycle of "Orpheus" poems from Brian Fawcett's forthcoming volume Aggressive Transport (Talon books, 1982). Mr. Fawcett occupies a unique vantage point in terms of the "outside"/"inside" duality: an established poet, he has taught creative writing in the University of Victoria Prison Program for several years and has encouraged and helped to develop the talents of many of the writers in Prison Journal. Richard Payne's fascinating record of his direction of last year's highly successful production of his own "rewriting" of Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi underscores just how effectively an "outside" audience can be reached from within the closed space of a prison's theatre and stage. A book review section is another new feature. Both reviews (of Jack Henry Abbott's In the Belly of the Beast, and britt hagarty's prisoner of desire) approach their subjects not as "con" texts, but as examples of prison literature which are significant and successful in exact proportion to their ability to broach more encompassing contexts. Amongst the great diversity of the works in this issue there is one salient quality which they all share: that any viable creative act which originates from the prison labyrinth must seek to combine-via the imagination-the literal and metaphorical poles of language. A striking characteristic of many of the pieces in this issue is in fact their use of mythological materials as an antidote to the naturalism and naive romanticism which has flawed so much prison literature. Especially notable in this regard is the work of John Abbott, Joe Chester, and David George. Finally, Tom Elton's Valediction To Shaun, the opening piece in this issue of Prison Journal, reminds us of the kinds of realities the imagination has to confront (often at great risk to itself) in the microcosm of the prison world.

Peter Murphy
English Instructor
University of Victoria
Program at Matsqui Institution

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A VALEDICTION TO SHAUN

I

Night
over the swamp
a gray mist rolls
to cover the mire
and the beauty

There is a twisted poplar there
its tangled roots
reach through the black muck

The mist parts
and the poplar appears
hazed silver in the night, then
is hidden once again
the mist folds in

A frog croaks
is echoed by others
You aren't here to hear them
see the poplar's light
in the darkness of the swamp.

II

Clouds drift
across the scarred face
of the yellow moon
as it arcs through the black
crystal studded sky

The clouds remind me
bring alive memories
of a darkness you carried
about your shoulders
a cloak of despair and
helplessness within a fate
you couldn't understand

You were trapped
within your darkness. You fought
for your life, struggled
and lost.

III

Within the swamp

you talked

of the circle
of years spent

on the run
from country to country
everyplace

your home
never permanent
relationships
started and discarded
like the many names used
to erase your identity

Forces of the swamp:
Law and Order and Revenge
reached out, brought you back
to a prison on the mire

Neon lives you'd lived
were dragged out
turned on
time and again in order
for your survival

You fell in love
with someone you couldn't
be with
someone outside
the swamp

I remember the days between
your visits
you were shrouded
in darkness. You couldn't see
refused to understand
the void

between the neon flashes
of her.

IV

There's no natural light
in the void

black runs on and on
and back into itself
it it

a black hole, absorbing
like a sponge
and a drop of water

wiped up and dissipated
throughout the strands
until there's nothing left
of the drop
once held a sparkle.

V

The comforting hold was
disturbed with thoughts of her

withheld, she reached into
you, caught at the
tendrils

of something
just
out of reach, tried

to share your night
the ever-present void

You were contained within
nothing

filled with horrors
worse because of their invisibility
You escaped it
by forgetting her for a time, but

the tendril wisps
beckoned

you in the darkness.

VI

Suicide is painless
the actors sing on M.A.S.H.

Painless. No, Shaun
it wasn't

was it?

Pain
wracked your body
as you lay in bed
waiting for death to replace
your void

Pain was
loud in your gasps
for breath, your choking echoed
down the tier. You suffered
as did we
for twenty-two minutes
until the poison worked

and you were silenced.

T. ELTON

POLITICS AND THE POET

POEMS AND AN EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH SHARON THESEN

This poem is simply called "X". It is about Jacobo Timerman whom some of you may have heard of. He is an Argentinian newspaper publisher-journalist and he is a Jew. In Argentina or in any repressive regime any person who writes or thinks or has an opinion about the repressive regime is sent to prison. Although these prisons are not officially recognized, all citizens of Argentina know about them. All those in government certainly know a lot about them. This evil goes on everywhere, not only in Argentina-Chile, the Middle East... Amnesty International attempts to get these "unofficial" prisoners freed or at least to get the authorities to account for them, those who have been systematically interred after that unexpected "knock in the middle of the night". Nice people who live in the suburbs, civil servants, get up in the morning to go to work to torture people all day. Jacobo Timerman (because he was a fairly famous person his absence was conspicuous) was released after a long stay in a clandestine prison. And, after a stay in a regular prison, he was finally fully released. He has written a book about these experiences entitled Prison Without a Name, Cell Without a Number. I read an excerpt from this book in The New Yorker. I was so stricken by what I had read that I wrote a poem which included several lines taken directly from Timerman's account:

for Jacobo Timerman

After the car thief came
& stole the white Pontiac
on the corner, & the police etc.,
after the sweet white Pope is gunned down
by a Turkish terrorist,
after a morning's litany of the recent
misfortunes, losses, and confusions
of others, of the general agreement
of dark times,

After reading an account by Jacobo Timerman of torture and solitary confinement in clandestine Argentine prisons: a Jew and a journalist: he said that in that place memory was his worst enemy. Offering advice to those who, in the future, will be tortured, since once it has been determined that a human being is to be tortured, nothing can prevent that torture from taking place. Complete passivity is the best course to follow, for it conserves much of the energy needed to withstand the torture. And so, one should allow oneself to be led meekly toward pain and through pain.

The name of the torture machine is Susan. In the arms of Susan, one knows only that his flesh is being ripped apart. And he howls. And electric shock leaves no stigmata, no signs of itself on the exhausted body.

I try to imagine Jacobo Timerman. His practice of the detachment of the insane to stay sane. His willfull submission to the guard, the blindfold, the walk down the corridor, the lying down on the table, the application of electrodes to genitals, tongue, nipples.

With these words I try to imagine Jacobo Timerman and I am ashamed. I do not wish to use the pain of others to write a poem. Yet it is my own pain I write, & the realization that I paid a certain careful attention to Jacobo Timerman's advice for it is precisely this poem that could lead me down the corridor toward Susan.

And so, these words, cells of a single body, imagine one another's pain, and listen. For the silence that terror brings. For exemption from tenderness, or the memory of tenderness. To the sweet birds singing, on an ordinary day.

That poem was hard to write. People who make the subjects of their poems atrocities, something there makes me very uncomfortable. Timerman's expose was very widely influential, it made the "situation" known, made it real. So many people are silent

(or they have been X'd out). But a poem is also a dangerous thing, for if I lived in Argentina a poem could lead me down the road to "Susan", the torture device which Timerman talked about. You cannot write in Argentina, you cannot write in the Soviet Union. If you are a writer there, you cannot write what you believe to be the truth, what you know about, and what you care about. You can only write propaganda. It is always the intellectual, the poet that they go for in a repressive society. Words are dangerous weapons. People say literature doesn't matter. Like Hell! It matters. Literature tells the truth.

Q. What is the situation for a Canadian writer whose society is obviously less overtly repressive than the examples you have been referring to?

A. In Canada you only get benignly ignored. Writers aren't suppressed, but on the other hand the power of art, of literature, isn't recognized to such a degree, and so the writer has a sense of impotence. To a large extent, art is seen as entertainment for other artists. It's a well-known fact, for example, that books of poetry are purchased mainly by other poets, if they're purchased at all. But there's also a lot of bad poetry around. I don't think our big problem as writers in Canada is censorship -- our big problem is mediocrity and complacency. To me, freedom is the big issue, and if you're relatively safe in your personal freedom to write or not write, i.e., nobody really cares, then the most blatantly concerned writing sounds like whining. Most so-called political poetry is written in the most reactionary verse forms, and as someone once said, no good cause is ever served by bad art.

Q. What do you see as the role of the artist in a culture?

A. That's a big question. But quite simply, the role of the artist in any culture is to make art. The role of the poet is to write poetry. I don't think of myself as having any particular responsibility to write respectable poetry. My loyalties are to poetry and truth, not to some ideology or other, while I recognize at the same time that ideologies infect the truth or at the very least distort it. I heard about a poetry contest in an Islamic country, where about 15,000 people were present. The "reading" consisted solely of devotional poems or poems about the country's history. No contemporary subjects were dealt with. Most of the people in the audience already knew the poems and chanted along with the reader. Those are countries in which certain artists have government sanction. I am suspicious at once of this situation. I don't write poems about big issues with the intent to enlighten people -- it sounds much to self-

Important -- unless there is some particular thing I immediately and clearly feel. If I wanted to make a statement I'd write an essay, not a poem, but I think that a poem informed by an image and a direct feeling would probably wind up making a better statement. I have to write from my own experience. If I tried, for example, to write about the oppression of Matsqui Institution, there is nothing I could say in either poetry or prose that would not make me sound like a nice white liberal lady from the outside.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The following mini-cycle, "Wilkinson Road Poems", appeared in Ms. Thesen's volume Artemis Hates Romance. The students at the poetry reading were quick to point out that she had -- however inadvertently -- written "prison literature". Wilkinson Road is well known as the site of a provincial lock-up. Ms. Thesen acknowledged that this information (of which she was totally unaware) added an extra dimension to the poems and also suggested that the prison is one of those focal points in a society that the poet ineluctably confronts, even if only in an oblique way.

WILKINSON ROAD POEMS

I

The choice between loneliness and half-being
& love and half-being
is no choice at all
but is bitterness & nowhere to be.

The tree whose fall is witnessed
is the tree that really falls.

Elderly widows starve to death
in their basements surrounded
by food they won't eat, money
they won't spend, charity they won't
accept. & the neighbours are shocked
& call the police & the story appears
on the front page,

imagine,
such perversity.

II

Outside it is winter.
The children skate
on the pond we can't get to
for the fences surrounding everything.
So we watch them
from the top of the hill & the dog barking
for a stick &
dim pain surrounds us
like time, or fog,
as the skaters glide & sprawl
in the distance &
the elements of memory thicken.

III

Definition

become doom: the inviolate lonely
I, neutered & obscure

I like to maintain the forms
& trust them for their ability to
take us out
of the merely personal, swollen selves
gently chewing on each other's innards,
the soft voices & bloody teeth
the aching vulnerable throats.
There is no
metaphor for love that is not
redness & pain that is not
hopelessness of who we are.

IV

New Year's Eve
& three couples try to dance
to Brownie McGhee
& radio oldfashioned tunes.
The dance stopping & the talk
starts, we talk & dance
fearsome spaces filling with bodies
words laughter.
No one knows what to say.
One of us is outside
freezing his butt walking around
& around the house
spilling beer on himself
muttering & smoking. We listen
to the radio & argue,
give him five more minutes
to get back in
before we go out there too.

IN THE BLOOD

DAVE ROURKE

The Springhouse sat on a hill overlooking the ranch. In the early morning, moisture beads would form around its cracks and seams. As the sun rose and the day grew warmer, the drops would splash on a ledge above the door, spraying mist over a knothole. When sunlight reached the door, a beam would shine through the hole, casting an iridescent arc over the spring.

By this time, the morning milking would be finished and the boy would carry it to the Springhouse. He would set the jug on the floor and peer into the dank interior. Today, he heard the hum of wings. Then he saw the dragonfly. It buzzed above the surface of the water like a large honey bee. As it circled closer, he reached out to swat it. The fly retreated and hung, hovering just beyond reach.

Suddenly the surface erupted. A silver form trailing a cascade of droplets, flashed through the air, snatched the fly in its gaping mouth, and vanished in a splash. The boy clapped his hands in approval. He came every day to watch Sam catch flies. Sometimes he brought him a grasshopper in a quartsealer. He would set the sealer in the water and let it float around the Springhouse. The hopper would leap, pinging against the tin insert like a raindrop. Sam would get excited. He would lay on the bottom waiting for the hopper to leap. When it did, he would catapult through the water, break the surface, and arc over the sealer, expecting a grasshopper. His gaping mouth found only air. The boy would laugh with delight. Sam just never gave up. He knew that hopper was there and everytime it pinged, he would jump. When the boy tired of teasing, he would throw the hopper on top of the water and watch Sam finally claim it. His dad said you had to be born with what Sam had. No one could give it to you. It had to be in your blood.

The whinny of a horse broke through his thoughts. He leaned against the wall and peeked through a crack. Down at the corral, he could see the men waiting. It was time.

Hiking up his pants, he glanced back at the spring and started down the hill. As he approached the corral, he nonchalantly kicked at a pile of dried horse droppings. The men watched him in silence. Grabbing a pole, he hauled himself over the corral rails and walked toward them.

Uncle Bob unlocked the horse's head and clamped the nostrils shut. His brother, John, grabbed an ear and sank his teeth in it. The horse haunched down in submission. The third man motioned the boy closer.

"Are you ready, Billy?" he asked. Billy stroked the horse's back and nodded. The men helped him mount and then cinched the belly-rope tightly over his right hand. "Now remember son," he cautioned, "when he lowers his head and rocks forward, lean back as far as you can, but never release your grip on that rope." The boy nodded and the men released their holds. As the horse gathered itself, Billy heeled him in the flanks. The animal came undone like a coiled spring. He jumped straight up and came down arched in a quivering bow. His back-end bounced, teeter-tottering skyward and downward in a series of rocking bucks. With each buck, the boy was stretched out taut - rebounding like a paddleball on a stiff elastic.

The men shouted encouragement. One of them yelled at him to squeeze the rope tighter or the bronc would "bust" him. The voices seemed so far away. Fragments of words, the sky, the ground - everything was spinning so fast. He tried to grip the rope tighter, but sweat from the horse and his palm made it slide. Flesh peeled from his fingers. He gritted his teeth against the pain. Suddenly, the bronc changed rhythm. He came down stiff-legged. The jarring impact snapped the boy's head back and broke his hold. The horse jumped again and Billy careened from its back.

The faces of the three men split into grins. They walked over and helped him to his feet.

"Still want that pony, son?" his dad asked.

Billy dusted his pants and jammed the stetson down hard on his head. "Yes, I want him," he murmured.

The men winked at each other and re-caught the horse. Billy climbed aboard. Before he could get set, the bronc ducked his head and fired. The boy flipped end over end and landed on his back. A woman came running into the corral shouting, "What are you men trying to do - kill that boy? You should be ashamed of yourselves." The men busied themselves around the corral and remained silent. The woman hurried over to the prostrate boy and propped him half-up. "Come on son," she implored, "come to the house." The boy looked at her and then at the three men. He slowly shook his head. She helped him to his feet. One of the men said to her, "Leave him be, Maggie, he's almost a man." The woman paused wiped the sweat from the boy's forehead and left.

The men readied the horse again. The boy mounted and was bucked-off again. The men no longer smiled or winked. The game had lost its humour. But the boy kept coming back. Finally, the horse quit bucking. He stood in the middle of the corral drooped in exhaustion. The boy sat in silence with his bloody hand tucked under his shirt. Uncle Bob came over and fastened a hackamore around the horse's head. John opened the corral gate. Billy urged the horse forward. As he passed through the gate, Uncle Bob remarked, "Some kid you got there, Jack." "Yeah," replied Jack, "I guess it's in his blood." Billy grinned through his busted lip and urged the horse toward the Springhouse.

EMPIRIDICULOUS

Science is where it's at? What
you see is what you get?

Water
in place of grey matter IQ 120
read it in Omni

Continuum
The Sun
shut itself off in the 70's

according
to accepted fact

Tahiti freezing
The Universe is as it should be
luminescent with mystery

portending
no beginning, no ending
just is is all

∞ all build me an orange
if you can please?
From nothing comes.....

JOSEPH-BRUCE NORMAN
CHAMPAGNE-CHESTER

THE ROSSLAND COURTHOUSE

In Cathedral lights, Chartres blue
three boars' heads emblazoned withal
Mathew Baillie Begbie
who'd hang
as often as he'd ride

white wigs dead in the sunshine
dust driven in buffets of air
as formula speeches
drag themselves
from pew to pulpit and back.

The accused
is the one the shotgun points out
click, shak, jack a round
'unit 1 unidentified male subject approaching
south west corner...
tan plymouth moving east, Alberta
licence plates watch the...'

the radio belt barks
to the guards
who watch the doors,
the windows,
slam the doors
as they guard the courthouse

the man on the dais
jumps in his eyes
the accused sits in a clear field
of fire.

JOHN ABBOTT

B L U E S

JAMES GREGORY

"The outer world is a reflection; partly it is his creation; sometimes it is his enemy; it is never indifferent. During the course of the novel, the world becomes progressively more hostile, as more and more, the hero's eyes turn inward." COUGH Fuck.

"Never indifferent. During the course of the novel the world becomes progressively more hostile" COUGH Jesus fucking Christ

The prisoner, experiencing frustration, gets up and goes and makes a cup of coffee, returns, rolls a cigarette and lights it, then resumes his reading.

"His creation; sometimes it is his enemy; it is never indifferent. During the course of the novel, the world becomes progressively more hostile" COUGH Jesus fucking Christ Almighty

The prisoner stands up, kicks his chair out of the way and proceeds to the TV room. He sits down and watches a standup comedian who has everybody in stitches. Then the passage that he has been trying to read begins repeating itself in his thoughts. As soon as he gets to the word 'hostile', the comedian stops his monologue, turns his head, looks the prisoner straight in the eyes and breaks into a fit of coughing.

ATLAS II

Atlas shru

gg

ed

the world

got a

new

weltanshauung

frac

tured

pic

tured

Athens

fell

Spartan

hell

Only

Thucydides

gave a fuck

out of

a job again

hole fucking place

normal.

JOSEPH-BRUCE NORMAN

CHAMPAGNE-CHESTER

ORPHEUS

When he came back from the darkness
with her
it was darkness
into which he came

and he was suddenly tired
of the feathery network, its signals
that everything he had sung and done
told nothing of what should be.

He went to rescue
a body of innocence
lost in the moonlight.

But in that moment of return
he saw the moon
in the mouth of the cave

and turned to demand
that she see

THE LAMENT OF ORPHEUS

Common cause with the wind
taxis cruise the rainslick streets

and pleasant, hungry women come and go
wanting little but the gleaming edge

of their desire to be beautiful
for maybe just an hour or two. Too bad

the desire for you doesn't fade away
as autumn turns to winter. Rather

each new lover scrapes along its edge
no longer pleasure but crusted

with infection, rust. Eventually
the taxis wear out too

just breaks wholly from the edge
and blows down the hill to the sea

leaving me dried out and drifting
common cause with the wind

and the gleaming edge
of my desire

for you

ANOTHER LAMENT

Voices of women
on the telephone, in bars

in the park, by the sea, in the dead of night
half audible cries of distress and rage.

But through the shadow chambers
and despite the constant sirens

you call me
all else merely clamours

or beats against this thicket I've become
with sticks, cocaine, new dalliance.

Euridice
your dark body calls to me again

was it rescue and
for whom

O Euridice

ORPHEUS' SUICIDE NOTE

Years later I see you again
pushing a grocery cart in a supermarket

and I rush to stop you
almost running up the aisle

pushing my own cart. You
turn the corner and I found you

standing near your husband.
Days later

It's still raining.
Your husband

checked your groceries through
while I bought mine

and you stood behind us
at the magazine rack

pretending to read Time/Life books.
I saw you standing there

gazing out across the traffic
splashing through the winter rain

BRIAN FAWCETT

your voice

this evening for the first time in
three months
i heard your voice -

But

your voice

was somehow woven into the chains
that kept my arms pinned to
my sides

- your voice

was somehow riveting the shackles
that were snarling round my legs

And

as i was pushed and pulled through
still another door

your voice

rolled down my cheek and splashed
against

some silent concrete

that was waiting

for both of us...

LLOYD MOFFATT

LAST POEM AT KENT

You have to be able
to hear the sea at night
even if it isn't there to hear

and there's only a moist confusion
hammered by
an ocean of anonymity.

You have to dream up
those crystal waves, take

deep breaths to keep off
those tainted sighs.

Death is everywhere: bloated corpses
of unlived lives
make slime
of what should be

the purest sea froth

and nearly everything we do
is wasted. There's so little
to console us. Friends
get lost, stars

dangle like words do now, out
of place in the dark
looking for the blue sheen
of the dawn where
the heart can whisper

and be heard above this crashing
phoney surf. Somewhere

it is quiet enough. A phosphorescent sea
somewhere gives up delicate islands
of human sound and sense

into a light that isn't temporary,
isn't subject to the death threats
streaming down the night

that's often all there is to hear and see--
nothing like the ocean each of us

has got to learn to be.

RON CARRIARI

FREEDOM TO SPEAK

A ROOT OF DEMOCRACY

Force the politician's mouth with bumperjacks.
Pull a salmon hook through his tongue.
find the color of his convictions.

His still born gurgles
are the foundation of his platform
his charismatic teeth are hurdles he chokes on

now you've taken his throat
in a vise.

Airborne
Dusts are particulate words
you breathe in
which are pinned by the net inside you
which pins everything.

Dredge the gaps between his bridges
not the spotlights on the paintwork
that are aimed for effect by the technician's
cameras.

Use that chisel and lift his gums
by now they're flexible redless and bold

How much did he cost?
when was he sold?

the question the rotohammer
will run along his jawline
shattered canals and shivered highways
float in the type ink that has splashed from his head.

soaking your dentist hands
while you dig for that root

a dentist for freedom.

JOHN ABBOTT

SPLendid SPECIMEN

-FOR DEBBI S.-

My eyes beheld
while walking
a passion.

Magnetic eyes
gazed,
flashed like lightning.
Insistent, demanding
attention.

Her scent:
pungent, penetrating, profound.

Sensual face,
delicate flanks.

Youthful lightness,
suppleness, softness
of movement;
grace.

Fur glistening
black.
Velvet bracelets
around her ankles.
Sinuous tail.

Solitary queen,
savage princess,
pitch black tigress.

Formidable apparatus of beauty
unjustly caged
in the park
zoo.

--H.L.S.--

A CHERRY IN A TREE

A small boy
ten years old
and a cherry tree
in the back yard
under noonday's sun

tall
full with red
fat cherries
within the green leaves

In a blue t-shirt
faded jeans
and sneakers The boy
stares up
measuring

Denim on bark
fingers clasped
around one branch
then another

He climbs
to peer over the roof
of the house
into the heart
of the city

Jason
in the tree
within the leaves

T. ELTON

DEMETER

The great ruined mill, a tower and a crown
of matted thatch, fallen in patches
like old men's hair
plants scramble up the thatch turned loam.

gray timber bones still stand
massive, fitted
without nails
the outlying barns of dark blood color
hay bales within
broken and scattered, a golden sea
breaks over a golden castle.

a girl and a boy,
two ends of a taunt spring
break away, pulled back together,
fighting, pounds his chest
he plucks at the straps of her coveralls.

their blood hot in the hay
grain dust sparkles gold dust sunrays
through slatted cracks
the shadows
and the growing spring.

she won't go down
it goes on and on
across the barn, a massive space
ecstatic dancing
he can't pull her clothes off
she won't let him go.

stranger walks in, watches
for the natural denouement, he waits
with no words he wanders over
holds down her arms, outflung ash boughs
while her companion strips her down.

the boy threshes her writhing sweat whipped
corn,
sowing and reaping
seasons ecstasy eyes glazed.

he's done, the crops in
sated
the boy leaves
the stranger lets go her arms
holds her head, nuzzles her neck
crashing passions of moments past
weights behind his eyes
saying things she doesn't understand.

JOHN ABBOTT

ORANGE

Black twin sinuous shadows o'er green
elastically elongate gossamer-thin

snaps back

thought-quick
shifting shadows sprightly coalescing
taffeta black o'er green...
rich Irish green chubby banks — carpet-like — with patches
o' clumps bristling crabgrass grabin'n'after

chiffon shadows playing

tag
dancing...
o'er an'round green sloping pregnant banks
undulating black on green
pursuing
each
other
green quivering
black twist'n'twirlin'

trailing twin rags o' paper

playing tag in the rough river wind...
weaken-subdued...
by the height

— oh, Manitou, is it high —

grey cement wall.
Two thin sinuous shadows
lazily
leisurely
following
one
following the other...
now scrambling,
now darting,
snapping out after the other...
searching...
touching briefly
brushing tentatively
entwining...separating...
s.l.o.w.i.n.g...d.o.w.n...their
game...of...tag...turning...into...ballet...
as...the...wall...I.M.P.E.D.E.S.

river wind

mellow-tempered
dance contour-contract-coalesce
in syncopation—

"YOU-MOTHER-FUCKEN-PIGS-QUIT-SCREWIN'-WITH-THE-HOT-WATER-
AND-FUCKING-WELL-TURN-IT-BACK-ON!"

....The ensuing silence hurt
the ears,,,electrically charged (eye-of-the-storm SILENCE),,,
lung-hurting silence of breath-held air,,,
hanging in the air silence with a texture an' a delicate feel
— S H A T T E R E D — CLUBBED ASIDE with:

"Pig-pig-pig-soo-oo-ooie-ee-e-e-e..."
"Ye-ah, pig, hoos in yor pen
pa-pa-porkin' y-yor ol' la-la-lady-pig?!"
"Oie-oie-oie-oink, oie-oie-oink, oink-oink-snort-snuff!"

Laughter...guffaws...loaded jibes...
more raucous laughter of many tones
pitching the scale from cruelty to
embarrassment, to 'me too— I'm one of the boys (ain't I?)'
The regular hum begins again, the human hum
of humdrum human activity with added
s's'sounds of hiss-ing water
plashing with splashing
words from disembodied voices
playing counterpoint t't'to
slap-slapping wet-feet on concrete
hot-hissing water slowly steaming windows
white fog in the corners cradled against
puke-green walls
century-old,
crack-chipped,
paint-plastered,
food-stained,
thrown up away from this twist in the soul...

through the white oval centre of the window...

a fire opal radiated a cornelian carmine haze
hanging

in a upturned purple-blue bowl
so cold
Brother Wind hid...
wild and woolly Cousin Williwaw went seeking
where-where-where-where-where...
Grandmother Red whispered to Sister Tree
Williwaw searching-searching-searching...
Sister Tree nods'n'shivers with delight
swooping down Williwaw
ruffles white-capped river in passing
spies Mr. & Mrs. Crow & their flock
smacks'em in their tail feathers
sunalive blue-black shimmers formation a flutter
wooping, Williwaw sings saucy songs
stirring awake the visual quiet
nodding no
Grandmother Fed and Sister Tree
tease should'n'should'n'should'n'should'n'should'n...
Williwaw teases whayawannashould'n—

ANIMAL SCREECH OF AGONY AND DEFIANCE
NEEDLE-SHARP PENETRATING SHRIEK
FREEZING BODY-MIND-SOUL

....Silence congealed brittle
cold and heavy
broken with a disembodied
"Who got mur—"

"YOU SADISTIC SWILL-SLOBBERING SWINES ARE SCREWING WITH THE HOT
WATER AN' SCREWING WITH YOUR HALF-WITTED USELESS PERVERTED
LIVESSSSss" (quick indrawn breath) "TURN ON THAT FUCKING
HYDRO OR-BY-JHRIST-YOU'LL-BE-PLUGGED-INTO-IT!"

Gravelly-Authoritative voice:
JERRY! WHO WAS THAT — FIND OUT!

"Hey, Jerry, hussull those fat buns en make it snappy!"
"Jerr-r-r-rie-ee...you can hustle your buns my way....I like'em
fat'n'cheeky an' jell-o wiggly."
"Double-time, quick march, Jerry!"
"Ka-come on, Ja-Ja-Jerry, give'us a gra-gra-grunt."

"Watch the heart, Jerry, can't be havin'ya puttin' on a
spectacle floppin' all'over the stairs; what'll the union
say'ta that? Nope, it just wouldn't do."
Laughter & more laughter & more catcalls tumbled over
hoots
hollers
razzing raspberries
farts &
barnyard imitations...
the hum, again the human hum begins again
— Dante didn't know — couldn't know...
o-o-oh..."Catch a hinge at That!
Hey Hermes
if you're not in bed with some 'lil jasper
get off your sloppy cunt
an' have a boo out the window..."
"Ya red-nigger, how long'ya bin getten drunk on, on...That...?"

—That, eluded language; threadbare-words couldn't contain,
molding words couldn't squeeze That solar wind made visible
singing the spectrum That Opus of the Spheres made chromide
slowly swimming in retreat through the purple-blue gravity-well
red-blood-red rays transmuting, transposing to strangely strange
Orange rays...an Awe...winter-shrunken sun sinking, washing walls molten—

"Rembrandt was a piker..."
"Yeah..."
"My throat hurts from where my heart got caught..."
"Yeah..."
"How does that line go...?"
"If it weren't for tears in the eyes
there'd be no rainbow in the soul..."
"Yeah..."

Maybe...
maybe...I'm finally going stir...
but...
but...by Manitou
never —
never have I experienced such an Orange...

Drunk? Yeah, drunk!

DAVID GEORGE

WHO ARE WE THIS TIME?

ITP'S PRODUCTION OF

ALFRED JARRY'S CIRCUS LUDICROUS PRESENTS 'BOSS UBU' (1981)

BY RICHARD PAYNE

I

In the darkening days of the Toronto theatre, a few years
after the 'boom' of the late Sixties, a fellow theatre-worker
lamented: "You know what's wrong with theatre now? No one
NEEDS to be up there onstage. It's become just another culture
business."

He was right. Somehow all the reasons I had become a
theatre-maker had faded out of reach, and I was at loose ends,
to the point where I quit Toronto and moved out to B.C. in
1980. Maybe in a new place I would encounter people with that
hunger for doing real theatre, and rekindle my own growth in
the bargain.

It wasn't until I stumbled onto ITP's (Institutional Theatre
Productions) 1980 production of An Enemy of The People that I
saw those elusive qualities alive and well. The usual professional
yardstick one uses to measure theatre technique seemed suddenly
irrelevant. What was happening onstage WAS theatre; raw, vibrant,
and NECESSARY. The audience was engaged by this commitment of
actors 'taking the space', and they enjoyed the excitement that
only live theatre -- ALIVE theatre -- can deliver.

That evening I encountered Ron Sauve, and within a few months
we were planning the 1981 ITP production as part of a U. Vic.
theatre course I would be hired to teach.

II

Ron was my Teaching Assistant for the course, as well as the driving force of the ITP. He took on the job of keeping everything on track from inside, especially me. It was not without the usual pressures and madness that accompany almost every theatre venture, and occasionally we would misinterpret each other's concerns. But the bottom line was clear. We would deliver theatre that could stand up to anything being done in Vancouver, expand our public attendance, and, in the process, support the development of Canadian Theatre as a whole. Just as prisons are a part of (not apart from) society, so too our theatre would be part of the larger effort. To this end, Ron set up a benefit for the Waterfront Theatre from our ticket sales, and supported the choice of producing a playscript I had written.

"We don't need, or want, to do plays about prison," he said. "We're IN Prison."

Good point. Yet every ITP show to date had centred on the theme of coming to grips with power, a context the audience was always aware of. They had done farcical comedies like Loot, and heavy-duty statements: Incident At Vichy and The Tower. What now? Theatre thrives on logically developing a style and repertoire, while taking the audience by surprise with each new show. A tall order.

I decided to take a chance: a clown play.

No one would be expecting a one-ring clown circus inside a federal prison. Especially the actors themselves. Clowning is a tough style to crack for any acting student. And the joint didn't seem to be rolling with uncontrolled chuckles. How the hell would we pull this off: The only answer was, we had to. The fact that the play was largely a lampoon of Macbeth would give the 'power & greed' theme its due, and the absurdity with which it was presented would be a fresh theatrical statement for the ITP. I somehow felt these guys could do it with an edge no one in outside theatre could match. Now I had to convince THEM.

III

In our initial group meetings, many concerns and questions arose.

"Is this just your trip? What will we get from doing this that's ours to keep and use?"

- I'll run us through all the basics that professional actors are exposed to in a theatre school, though it will be just a brief exposure. I'll explain, after we do it, what each exercise is for, and how it's applied to other theatre forms. Use the teacher/director as an open resource for developing your own skills; take as much from me as you possibly can in the time we have to work together.

"I've acted before, but I still have stage fright, you know?"

- So do I, and I've been at this for 15 years. I'll show you how to channel that nervous energy into your performance, use it as a fuel.

"Yeah, well I've acted in a couple of these shows, and I just struggled with all the lines most of the time I was onstage. I'm not sure I really believed I was that character. How do I learn to solve a character role from a script?"

- Beyond concentration, which directs all your energies, you need to use text analysis. The Stanislavski method will show us how to case a character's objective, the inner motivations that result in the words and actions we see in the play. Let's apply it first to other play scenes, from the show you did last year, for example; then, we'll apply that tool to our own script. Even clowns need a motivation to 'be'. Especially when they have to improvise their own play.

"Improvisation. Some of this script has scenes with only brief descriptions -- no dialogue or blocking. What do we do?"

- Take chances. This script is designed as a teaching vehicle. We'll all 'write' part of our roles, make this play our own. And I'll build each clown around your individual energies, rather than make you fit into a preconceived mold. YOU will be the play.

"When do we start?"

IV

The first rehearsal/workshops were pretty buggy. People making strange noises, crawling around the floor, shouting each other down with nonsense words. Other guys dropping by to grab coffee were dumbfounded. And, after we opened, I discovered the actors had been as well. "We thought in that first month that maybe you were off your stick. Couldn't figure out what use all that craziness was, other than to have fun. But we used every bit of it in the play, didn't we?"

Yes, we did. And often, you can't over-explain or 'tip your hand' until the actor makes the discovery on his own; only then do you discuss how to apply it. But then, too, I was never exactly clear from moment to moment where we were, how well we were progressing. I had acted in prisons before, but not worked inside as a director. Would my way of doing theatre on the outside work in here?

"Your turf is the joint, and mine is theatre-making. Let's keep each other 'on line', so neither of us starts working counter to what's really going on." I said this to remind them, and myself, that I didn't know, could only guess, what the rest of their day was really about. And it's sure to influence how we can work from day to day. No difference, really, from working with actors on the outside, though their problems seem pretty trivial in retrospect.

As my T.A., Ron tried to make me aware of where give-and-take would have to come on my part. And it was hard and painfully slow work for me to tune in to the realities. This is always hard for an outsider to gauge, and one has to just go with the punches, manage as best he can from day to day. It is a real credit to Ron and the guys that whenever I miscalculated and went wrong, they always stuck by me and the project, and helped me to help them realize our mutual goal.

V

The orientation period (consisting mainly of general exercises and theatre games) eased fairly quickly into improvisational clowning, and finally, script/rehearsal work for the

production. These were the hardest-working theatre students I had ever encountered. They took risks, fresh ideas came quickly, and enormous leaps in understanding were not uncommon. They were soon helping one another to solve problems, and I knew we were rapidly approaching the magic lever, the sense of 'company' which makes ensemble theatre happen.

I suggested a metaphor central to our situation. "Imagine the mediaeval theatre troupe, the 'commedia dell'arte', a group of families living and working together, travelling across Europe during the Black Death. Each time they come to a town (or in our case, with each new audience), they call up to the walls. Will they be welcomed, to perform in exchange for food and lodging, or will they be doused with boiling oil, or imprisoned?" Actors have always been quasi-outlaws in society, and many countries have seen theatre made illegal for long periods of time. The comparison to being a theatre company, with the walls turned outside-in seemed apt.

But the real point here was family. We remembered that a theatre group, started in a New York Prison, eventually became a public theatre of ex-cons that played in The Lincoln Centre in NYC -- called THE FAMILY. We would have to believe that we were indeed a circus troupe composed of circus families. And that our inter-relationships were reflected in our roles onstage. We worked backwards, basing these imaginary lives on the roles we were to perform in the play.

"Don here, who plays the fuddy-duddy character, is getting a little long in the tooth; he doesn't have the stamina anymore for the strenuous lead roles, and sometimes can't remember his lines." Laughter -- we were always teasing him about miffing a load of almost identical cue-lines. "So, his brother, Ron, now plays these more demanding roles, and is the head actor in the company, the one we build plays around." Again, true enough. "Both Don and Ron are proud of Pat here -- Ron's son, Don's nephew -- because this is Pat's first big role, the 'juvenile' lead, and they're trying to pass on their expertise; he's the next generation." Pat was indeed doing his first theatre work ever.

We continued with this approach, until we had just about everybody defined. Dennis' 10-year-old daughter joined us for weekend rehearsals, and they were developing a series of clown turns together -- the proverbial show-biz kid born in a theatre-trunk, learning the trade. Because clowns are not restricted to regular gender, we were able to incorporate transexual prisoner-actors into the scheme, and our 'family' was complete.

People began calling each other by their stage names, developed their own banter corresponding to text they had in the play, and held 'family unit' rehearsals when we were not onstage.

Soon the rehearsal space became the 'real' world, and the stage was where we plied our trade. The world beyond the rehearsal-hall doors, at most times, came to be quite distant. Calls for count seemed to drop on us from outer space. (It was later that I learned some of the guys were showing up for count wearing their clown-noses.)

VI

There is no time here to go into all the day-by-day thrills and frustrations that resulted in our coup of having one of the hottest shows of that Vancouver theatre season. All the major critics were glowing with praise for what the group had achieved. The SUN called it "an unexpected delight -- as lively and interesting as a rabbit popping out of a hat -- this imaginative ensemble fantasmagoria is Matsqui's best and funniest effort to date." From the PROVINCE: "A remarkable degree of theatrical sophistication -- an inspired piece of zaniness, a little like a marriage between Satyricon and Monty Python." And CBC-Radio ARTS NATIONAL: "A tribute to what dedicated theatre people can do -- a gleefully defiant bellow from within the prison walls."

It is perhaps most satisfying to see the recognition that the actors earned for their consistently imaginative, self-disciplined, and collective effort:

"From a stylistic point of view, this genre presents some formidable performance problems. In this production the performers rise brilliantly to the occasion. The basics are all there. In fact, some of the cast members turn in work that is more than acceptable by professional standards." (Bob Allen, THE PROVINCE)

The fact is, the guys did just about everything. They designed and built an entire circus inside the walls, taught themselves to juggle, invented more ideas than I could possibly fit into one evening of theatre. And most importantly, they worked together with a sixth sense to keep the play vital for an entire month of public shows. We had 20 people who knew exactly what real theatre was: THEMSELVES.

We had, of course, unusual problems for a theatre company. Someone's concentration in performance is down, because they're facing a possible beef of another 10-12. Where the hell is my costume? No musician tonight -- he's in court. Someone pinched an essential prop. The tape machine is broken AGAIN! The passes for 20 of the audience got screwed up at the gate...

No one said theatre was easy. Bust somehow, the show goes on. Everyone covers.

And it's a real high to see the public unwind, laugh their guts out, delight as a clown moves through the seats, picking "fluff" off the knee of a 3-piece suit. When the 2 clown armies do battle with mops and toilet plungers, everyone in the audience understands the joke about 'props' restrictions inside. And there's the scene where the "guards" lock up a character, only to find themselves tied to each other, the victim long gone...! Double-edged theatre, with a nose on.

We had lots of kids and grandparents. Several of the Matsqui population who mixed with the audience every night became virtual groupies. Everyone valued the easy interaction that was going down against all expectations.

The chemistry was good. And I was lucky enough to be there every night. We lost one of our central actors at the last minute, and I stepped in to take over the role. I was the only one onstage who didn't know his lines, and I had written them! That's the theatre. I used a fictitious name in the programme, so the audience wouldn't watch the author-director watching the actors.

After the shows, the audience stayed to talk until we were cleared out. I'll never forget the mixed feelings with which college students approached me -- some undecipherable blend of fear, fascination, admiration, puzzlement. I was feeling for a brief moment what the guys will have to deal with on the outside most of their lives. It was not comfortable dealing with the caution, the strain of hesitant enthusiasm; fortunately, the enthusiasm always won out as the minutes passed.

Someone had said to me, some months before, "We're not animals, goddamnit. And once we make real contact with them, they know it, but they don't know how to put that together with the place we have to live, or how we got here." 'To see ourselves as others see us' works both ways when you bring society inside the walls to meet prisoners giving back theatre that is full of human risk.

I've always described the reality of theatre as a controlled hallucination, the suspension of mundane belief. Or, as Picasso put it: "Art is a lie which reveals the truth." What happens when you play with 'deliberate madness' in a highly structured way? The guys in the program found that theatre was real and viable, and a way of dealing constructively with a world that is complicated and sometimes insane.

Most of these guys are now out, or in other joints. One is working tech at Tamahnous Theatre. Another is working on a film script about our work. Others will never do theatre again. But for those few months, we were all flying. How can one deny the need for this kind of work inside? Why did 2 of the actors go and delay their parole so they could finish work on the play?

THEATRE INSIDE is a magic window back to a world that is, in some tiny way, a little more real than much of what lies over the fence. And that new reality can't be counted or logged in a file -- It's part and parcel of the men who go back out through the gates with something new inside them.

A COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL CRITIQUE

In the Belly of the Beast. By Jack Henry Abbott. Toronto: Random House, 1981. Pp. 166.

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As a psychologist, my first response to Jack Henry Abbott's book, In the Belly of the Beast: Letters from Prison, was how did this man become this way? This led to another question, or perhaps reservation, about asking such a question: Is this leap to analysis worthwhile? My answer is yes, since the position stated by Abbott represents a cognitive model which exceeds the bounds of Abbott's personal history.

As a developmental psychologist, I believe that Abbott makes an important assertion which demands an answer. He states it clearly when he says "I realize, but not as fully as I should, that all these doubts about myself are only expressions of my isolation. Given the material freedom to act, to organize and develop situations and ties, no such self-doubt would enter my mind. I would laugh to remember these present days of my 'reflections on my reflections'" (p. 90). Throughout his book, Abbott confirms his efforts to attain a state of will which cognitively is represented by firmness of resolve, clarity of rules and, above all, lack of doubt. In other words, Abbott has outlined his views of the ideal mature state, or the goal of development.

An alternative view may be found today within developmental psychology. Oddly enough it comes from a group of theorists who are Marxists (oddly, because Abbott states that he is a Marxist). These theorists suggest that mind results from activity, but not simply mental activity. It is a reflection of concrete experience as well as thoughts around experience. Thus the activity of the mind can be abstract or concrete, and, within the context of activity, it evolves.

True to the dialectical materialist basis of this assertion, mind is seen to be continually in a state of change, since the experience of the person is ongoing. In contrast to this, one of the most outstanding features of Abbott's book is the cast of characters: static, metaphysically categorized groups which are accompanied by rigid rules of action (generally directed against them). There is no evidence, in this world, of dialectical interactions. Abbott sees guards, wardens, homosexuals, capitalists, snitches, etc. as species set apart: they may act upon him, but they have no connection to him. His actions do not influence their nature, and their characteristics are unlike his own:

"Among themselves, these pigs are evil to the point of boredom. I've seen them among themselves; I've heard their talk. They are extremely venal. Extremely devoid of any trace of spirituality. Their dullness approaches the mentally defective" (p. 61).

Abbott further states that, as a result of belonging to a particular group (and everyone, Abbott states, is either oppressed or an oppressor), one's actions are defined: eg., guards obey violence, prisoners do not. These are representative of Abbott's world of rules and categories: each category is separate and is accompanied by certain laws which are inevitable: Gerald, who has rebelled against both the prison and the inmates, will be murdered. A punk, possessed by an inmate, cannot be addressed directly by anyone else. Outside the prison, Abbott suggests that similarly rigid rules apply: communists are the only ones who have ever supported prisoners or who tell the truth about prison conditions. In fact: "Communists always behave as anyone would expect real people in a real society to respond to one another" (p. 97).

These examples illustrate the clarity of Abbott's rules. The question, however, is why these evolved. To understand the process, we can borrow from Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

Piaget suggested that cognitive structures are inborn. More recently, dialectical materialists have rejected this structuralist assumption, but have kept the processes which form the heart of Piaget's theory: assimilation and accommodation. If mind is formed by activity, then mind may be described as mental acts of varying probabilities, rather than structures which emerge. Assimilation is the process of adding new actions by incorporating them into a network of existant activity, the network remaining essentially unchanged. Thus one could greet a friend frequently (an existant action) or one could use the same activity to greet a stranger (assimilation of a new action). Traditional psychology would describe this in terms of stimulus and response: the response is the same, but the stimulus (friend vs stranger) has changed. Activity theorists, however, note the artificiality of dividing the target of action from action (which incorporates a target).

Abbott, who spent most of his incarcerated time in solitary confinement, was permitted to assimilate new ideas. In fact, his reading of philosophy is impressive and it is clear that he has seriously considered the ideas which he has encountered. However, it is also clear that he has assimilated the ideas into his existing rules and biases. Accommodation, the process by which Piaget saw cognitive structures form, appears to be absent. Accommodation, or the changing of basic behavioural strategies, is necessary when one is thrown off balance, when it is clear that one's present ways of thinking are not adequate to explain one's experience. In other words, accommodation comes when one is in a state of doubt, and doubt therefore is necessary for the addition of new ways of knowing about one's world.

Abbott glorifies lack of doubt to a degree that is puzzling to the outsider. This may be understandable within the context of the prison itself. Rigidity, as a consistent quality, must have emerged from a rigid way of acting within a specific environment. Indeed, Abbott suggests that this is the case: "Prison regimes have prisoners making extreme decisions regarding moderate questions, decisions that only fit the logical choice of either/or. No contradiction is allowed openly. You are not allowed to change. You are only allowed to submit;..." (p. 12). Abbott, in this passage, documents his cognitive history. Faced with a rigid prison regime, he had to decide on which type of rigidity he would embrace (and he embraced rebellion). To survive, he generated rules, and as a safeguard against breaking his own rules he fought off doubt.

This behaviour is not specific to, or ubiquitous among, prisoners. In fact, a moderate version of this type of development was once seen as the ideal state of cognitive maturity. According to some theorists (e.g. Erikson), in adolescence one chooses an ideology, along with an occupation and a mate, and heads down the long grey tunnel of adulthood, armed with the trappings of maturity. In reality certain environments appear to invite this type of behaviour: a social environment which idealizes lack of change, knowing one's own mind, and stability would certainly withdraw its rewards from the individual who was not easily categorized. In the case of Abbott, we see an example of a person-environment interaction in which the highest human intellectual functions of evaluation, reassessment and creation, are suppressed. It makes no sense to talk of the question of responsibility in this case since both Abbott and the prison were necessary players in this act. It is important, however, to note that Abbott's cognitive strategies are much more useful inside a prison than out in society. Inside, he is faced with the relatively stable environment in which the rules which he follows were produced. Outside, in social environments such as Norman Mailer's cocktail circuit, such rules are hopelessly inadequate. The transition from prison to non-prison society demands a type of flexibility of thought which will not develop nor be maintained in vacuo.

AN UNIMAGINATIVE WORK

Prisoner of Desire. By britt hagarty. Vancouver and Los Angeles: Talonbooks, 1979. Pp. 290.

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Contrary to general opinion, it is the failed novel that most often necessitates an 'academic' approach in the clinical sense, not the successful one, let alone the 'classic' work, for they contain some type of imaginative illumination of the relationship between self and world. Pity then the unfortunate reviewer of britt hagarty's Prisoner of Desire: this would-be 'underground classic' which purports to 'tell it how it is' in the prison world and the demi-monde of the heroin junkie is pretentiously over-written and crudely and naively stylized. In short, it is anything but 'realistic', the catch-all phrase by which these semi-autobiographical 'exposes' are invariably justified and promoted by those trying to cash in on the still lucrative 'pris. lit.' market.

The best bits of Prisoner of Desire are the superficially objective descriptions of Victoria City Jail, Okalla etc., since they do not require any imaginative penetration of surface to reveal larger realms of signification. Imagination is indeed the missing ingredient from the very title itself: 'I wanted her completely to myself, a prisoner of my imagination and my desire' (pp. 29-30) (Italics mine). As you can see, this is not in fact a prison novel at all: the hero, Sean Gallagher, is a willing victim of the charms of the beautiful Erin. The novel is a painfully contrived and childish burlesque of Proust's 'remembrance of things past'. Somebody should explain to hagarty that Proust (supposedly his favourite author) was only able to create his world after he discovered, via the 'miracle of involuntary memory', a state beyond desire, beyond volition, where true imaginative insight was finally granted. What hagarty tediously offers instead is a number of highly self-conscious evocations of lost love, plus a series of picaresque exploits

by Gallagher, who egotistically tries to convince himself that he is handsome, intelligent, sensitive, poetic... ad nauseam. Just 'showing flash', as the 'cons' say.

As a novel, Prisoner of Desire is a total failure; as a case history of 'arrested' psychological and literary development, it does, however, possess a certain 'academic' interest. The plot describes Gallagher's efforts to create a pastoral world of innocence with Erin, a dream that is rudely punctured by a series of 'busts' and bouts in jail. Their love affair, the novel's centre, is totally unconvincing and unmoving, containing some of the work's most ridiculous stylization. Erin is a 'flower child', a complete innocent. Witness one of her typically inane utterances: "Look at the lovely oak trees... they're losing their leaves, the poor dears" (p. 55). Large chunks of the novel read like a completely unintentional burlesque of 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love'. The novel's coherence is destroyed by the fundamental irreconcilability of the pastoral and picaresque forms as handled by hagarty, without any sense of irony to mediate and exploit their incongruities. What is really interesting here is that, just as the novel's protagonist lacks any real cognitive or moral development and is 'arrested' at the primitive ego stage, the novel's very structure also exhibits an atavistic return to the origins of prose fiction - the pastoral and the picaresque, both finally secondary to some juvenile idea of the romance. These forms are, of course, very much still alive, but the problem is that hagarty writes without any sense of historical consciousness, and uses these literary forms naively and primitively. Caron's Go-Boy! is so effective because it authentically recreates the picaresque; Genet's Thief's Journal is a masterpiece because it transforms imaginatively the picaresque world of the prison into a strange new type of pastoral, the 'perverted' magically becoming the sacred. Prisoner of Desire, on the other hand, only offers us a juxtaposition of the pastoral and picaresque, without any exploration of their inherent contradictions. There is more insight in this phrase by one of Samuel Beckett's narrators in Texts for Nothing - 'I spent half of my life in the prisons of their Arcady' - than there is in the whole of Prisoner of Desire, for it raises the question of identity in terms of a searching social critique.

The moral focus of hagarty's novel is so confused as to be virtually non-existent. The hero wanders aimlessly between egotistically inflated self-evaluation, banal condemnations of the social system (which is, of course, blamed for his problems), and melodramatic (and totally unconvincing) self-condemnation ('I ran ... into the howling wet night, which was as dark and malevolent as the deed I'd just committed', p. 50). Rather than

pursue his examination of the world of the junkie-prisoner until it reveals some authentic insight, hagarty invariably blocks any real application of the imagination by trotting out some trite moral exemplum: 'fixing is ... a confession of frustration and self-hatred, an ode sung to the God of Death in the Land of Despair' (p. 68). All these abstractions repeatedly nullify the accurate observations of aspects of prison life which might have served as the basis for a truly imaginative grappling with the question of self-identity.

The novel concludes with Gallagher's release from Okalla; Erin has been lost, but we are assured that she 'lives on, both in my mind and in the manuscript under my arm' (p. 290). Of course, this is blatantly untrue: how could a creature so poorly imaged ever have possessed a life, imaginary or otherwise? The manuscript should have remained where the novel's epigraph tells us it had been, 'on the floor between the beer bottles and the honkytonk drums'.

